

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER  
LISTED

FEB 09 2005

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Chief Theater

other names/site number Gossett Theater; Stark's Comanche Theater

2. Location

street & number 122 East Main Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Coldwater [N/A] vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Comanche code 033 zip code 67029

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the  
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In  
my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be  
considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Christy Davis Signature of certifying official/Title Christy Davis/Deputy SHPO Date 12/23/07

Kansas State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

☐ removed from the  
National Register

☐ other, explain  
See continuation sheet [ ].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

Chief Theater  
Comanche County, KS

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## 5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses in  
Kansas

Number of contributing resources  
previously listed in the National  
Register.

0

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Function

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

Current Functions

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> & EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
AMERICAN MOVEMENT: Two-part  
Commercial Block

Materials

Foundation: Concrete  
Walls: Brick  
Roof: Asphalt  
Other: N/A

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Chief Theater  
Comanche County, KS

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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### Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

Recreation & Culture  
Architecture

### Periods of Significance

1928-1955

### Significant Dates

1928  
1947

### Significant Person(s)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Gossett, Paul E. (architect)  
Howard, Thomas H. (general contractor)

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

# \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Chief Community Theater, Inc.

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Chief Theater  
Comanche County, KS

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property less than 1 acre**UTM References**

A. Zone Easting Northing  
14 470966 4124902

B. Zone Easting Northing

C. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Kristen Ottesen, Architectural Historian and Elizabeth Rosin, Partnerorganization Historic Preservation Services, LLC date June 2004street & number 323 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 112 telephone 816-221-5133city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64105**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black-and-white photographs** of the property.**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Chief Community Theater, Inc.street & number P.O. Box 513 telephone (620) 582-2705city or town Coldwater state KS zip code 67029

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Chief Theater  
Comanche County, Kansas

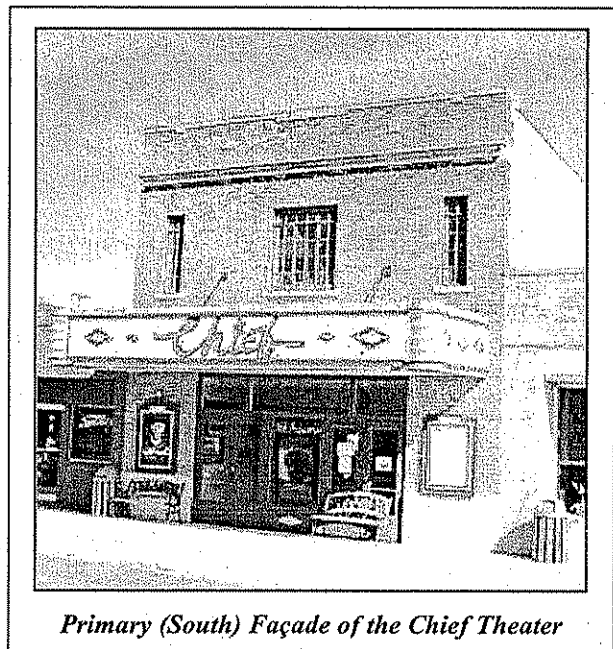
## SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT

The Chief Theater, located at 122 East Main Street, Coldwater, Comanche County, Kansas, is a two-story brick two-part commercial block building measuring approximately 28 feet wide by 120 feet deep. The building has a flat roof with a parapet. It is located on the north side of Main Street in Coldwater's historic commercial district. The Chief Theater exhibits the general form and configuration of the movie theater property type that was built throughout American small town commercial districts during the early twentieth century. The simple buff-colored brick façade of the Chief Theater does not exhibit a particular architectural style; rather, it is a vernacular commercial block building, which was modified to accommodate its specialized use as a movie theater. With the majority of its character-defining stylistic features and its interior and exterior materials intact, the Chief Theater retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### SETTING

The Chief Theater is located on the main commercial street in Coldwater, Kansas, just east of U.S. Highway 183. With a population of approximately one thousand, Coldwater is the largest town in sparsely populated Comanche County.<sup>1</sup> One-part and two-part commercial block building types constructed between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries line both sides of the 100 block of Main Street. The wide street provides parking in the center of the street and in front of the buildings. The Chief Theater's primary (south) façade abuts the concrete sidewalk in front of the building. The theater shares party walls on the east and west sides with brick one-part commercial block buildings. The theater's north (rear) façade faces a gravel alley.



*Primary (South) Façade of the Chief Theater*

### BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The Chief Theater has solid brick walls and a concrete foundation. The theater's primary (south) façade is three bays wide and has a simple design with very little ornamentation. At the first story, a movie poster

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case in each of the outer bays flanks a large central opening. The opening contains two sets of double-leaf wood doors that flank a third, large movie poster case in the center of the facade. A fixed transom with three lights spans the openings. The wood doors, panel, and transom are currently painted green with burgundy trim. A limestone water table rises to the bottom of the movie poster cases and anchors the textured, buff-colored brick wall. The second story contains three window openings. A projecting limestone cornice is above the windows. Small projecting blocks consisting of three soldier bricks appear four courses below the parapet cap, roughly dividing the space between the cornice and the parapet coping into thirds. A course of alternating rowlock and soldier bricks with pieces of limestone on each end define the coping.

The second story features three steel casement windows painted a deep burgundy color. Each of the end bays has a tall rectangular window opening containing one sash with eight lights and a fixed two-light transom. The large window opening in the center bay contains three sashes, each of which has eight lights and a fixed two-light transom. Except for clear glass replacement panes, the window glazing is wire glass.

The façade's most prominent feature is the bold metal marquee that hangs above the entrance and projects over the sidewalk. The rectangular marquee has cylindrical corners accented with neon lighting. The front features painted diamond shapes flanking the theater's name – "Chief" – painted in cursive letters, all of which have a neon light overlay. The marquee is painted burgundy, green, and yellow, harmonizing with the colors of the windows, doors, trim, and the movie poster cases.

Unadorned brick walls form the east and west elevations and extend to the north beyond the party walls. Single doors toward the rear (north) of each side elevation provide egress from the auditorium. A small addition extends from the rear (north) elevation and houses mechanical equipment and an evaporative cooling unit. Constructed of structural clay tile, the addition is approximately one-story tall and has an arched roof covered with corrugated metal.

#### INTERIOR

Directly inside the building, restrooms and a ticket booth flank the small foyer that occupies the center of the building. The east wall contains the ticket window; the west wall has mounted movie poster cases. A pressed metal ceiling decorates the lobby and carpet covers the floor.

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas State Historical Society, "Kansas Counties" [database online]; available from <http://www.kshs.org/genealogists/places/counties.php?county=CM>; Internet; accessed June 16, 2004.

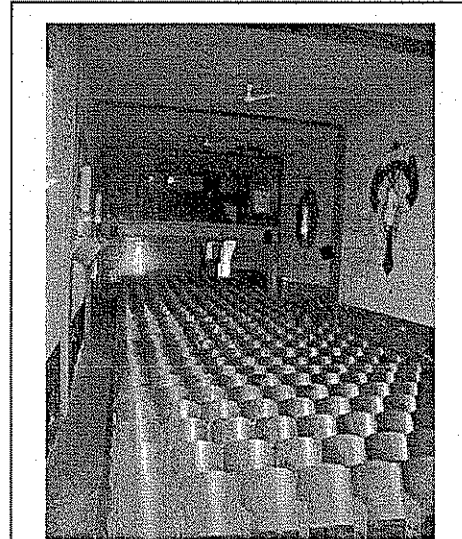
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Chief Theater  
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The foyer features a series of murals painted by local artist Don Nicholas in 1947. The scene on the east wall above the ticket window depicts the town of Coldwater with oil derricks, a train, farm implements, buildings, and a cloud producing tornadoes — all symbols of the town's industry, built environment, and climate. On the north wall, above the doors leading into the auditorium lobby, a painting depicts Native Americans and Euro-American settlers hunting on the plains. On the west wall, above the movie poster cases, there is a painting of a Native American domestic scene with a pueblo and a native Kansas sunflower. On the south wall, above the entrance, there are simple line drawings of a southwestern landscape. The swinging paneled wood doors to the lobby have painted stylized Native American designs on the foyer side and full-length corn stalks on the lobby side.



*View toward the auditorium  
south balcony wall*

A set of double-leaf doors on the north wall of the foyer leads to the lobby, which spans the width of the building. Doorways on either side of the north lobby wall flank a makeshift concession stand<sup>2</sup> and provide access to the auditorium. The east and west walls have staircases leading to the balcony. The southwest corner of the lobby contains a single restroom. The southeast corner of the lobby contains a ticket booth. Composition tile covers the lobby floors and an acoustical-ceiling tile covered with a brown textured paint<sup>3</sup> covers the ceiling. Carpeted runners cover the middle of the balcony stairs. Stenciled on the east and west walls, just below the ceiling, is a semi-circular stylized border. Painted above the doorways to the auditorium are stylized landscape and floral images. On the north wall, behind the concession stand, a painting of a Native American face with a flowing headdress is the most prominent feature in the lobby. The painting is above the louvered opening in the center of the north wall. The wainscot in the lobby is painted dark green, the walls are painted white, and the trim around the doors is painted dark red.



*North Lobby Wall of the Chief Theater*

<sup>2</sup> The concession stand was possibly added during the 1947 renovation.

<sup>3</sup> This treatment may date to the building's 1947 renovation.

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Comanche County, Kansas

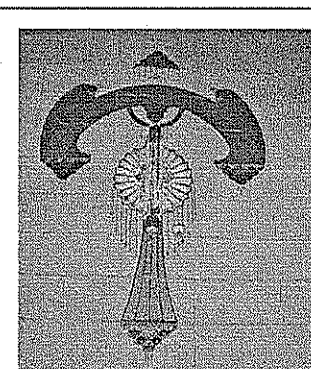
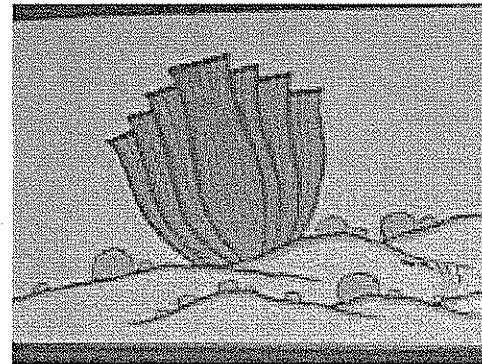
Two doorways flanking the concession stand provide access to the long rectangular auditorium. The concrete floor slopes down from the rear of the auditorium toward the stage at the north end of the building. Near the stage, the floor slopes upward slightly. The wooden stage curves outward toward the auditorium and is accessed from two sets of semicircular concrete stairs in the front corners. The proscenium walls that separate the stage from the auditorium and enframe the stage are plain. The basement is located under the stage and is accessed from the center front of the stage at the auditorium floor. It originally housed two dressing rooms as well as the building's mechanical systems. An addition to the rear (north) elevation of the building now houses mechanical equipment. From the south wall, the balcony extends forward approximately one-quarter of the auditorium's depth.

The Native American decorative scheme continues into the auditorium. Most of the interior finishes date to the 1947 renovation. Fibrous panels<sup>4</sup> cover the walls and larger square panels cover the ceiling. The wainscot has a plaster finish that is painted dark red. Decorating the matching side walls are large stencils of stylized Native American-inspired designs. The center bays feature three different design elements. Mounted to the center of each stencil and incorporated into the design are long, vertical, Moderne style glass sconces with circular metal reflective panels. The plaster pilasters along the side walls are painted blue with small, simple line drawings in gold. Painted on the front of the balcony is a southwestern landscape scene similar to the one on the south wall of the foyer.

The auditorium seats date to the 1947 renovation. They are in fair to poor condition. The wooden veneer on many of the seat's backs is peeling and the red upholstery on many of the seats is ripped. The all-wood seats in the balcony are generally in poor condition. The balcony seats appear to



*Paintings in the Lobby of the Chief Theater*



*Stencil on the  
auditorium wall*

<sup>4</sup> The panels appear to be Celotex or a similar product.



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be older than those on the main floor and may date to the building's 1928 construction.<sup>5</sup>

**INTEGRITY**

The Chief Theater continues to reflect its historic function as an entertainment venue. The building retains its historic form, plan, spatial arrangement, proportions, scale, and massing, as well as the majority of its functional and character-defining elements and materials. While many of the theater's original finishes were altered during the 1947 renovation, these changes occurred over fifty years ago and are historic in their own right. They reflect the evolution of the movie industry and contribute to the significance of the property. The building retains a very high degree of integrity and clearly communicates its historic associations and feelings as a movie theater.

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<sup>5</sup> While the balcony seats are not upholstered, an article in the November 16, 1928 *Western Star* mentions that the new theater had upholstered seats.

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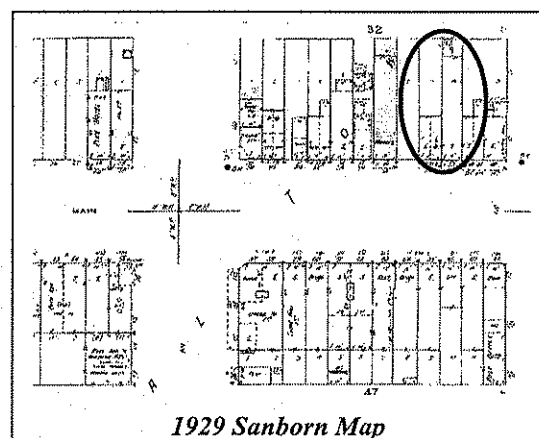
## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Chief Theater at 122 East Main Street, Coldwater, Comanche County, Kansas is significant under National Register Criterion A for the area of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as documented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas." The Chief Theater has direct associations with the historic context "Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1954," developed as part of the MPDF and meets the MPDF registration requirements. Constructed in 1928 and renovated in 1947, it is an excellent example of the movie theater property type built in small towns throughout Kansas and the United States in the early twentieth century. Designed and built by local residents, the Chief Theater illustrates a vernacular commercial building form, the two-part commercial block, adapted to fulfill a specialized function as an early movie theater. The 1947 renovation of the theater altered some aspects of its original plan and décor, but these changes reflect a common trend in movie theater operation that required cosmetic updating to remain attractive to audiences tempted by newer theaters and technologies, such as radio and television. Added over fifty years ago, the interior artwork depicting aspects of local history created by local artist Don Nicholas has become a significant character-defining feature of the building's interior. While the use and form of many similar theaters have been drastically altered for other commercial endeavors when more modern movie houses opened in their vicinity, the Chief Theater remains intact. The period of significance for the Chief Theater begins with its construction in 1928 and ends in 1955, the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility.

## PROPERTY HISTORY

Designed in 1928 by its first owner, Paul E. Gossett, The Chief Theater was originally called the Gossett Theater. Thomas S. Howard was the general contractor and R. E. McGaully was the interior designer. Review of the Sanborn maps suggest that it was the only movie theater in town at the time it was constructed, and given the small size of the town, it may be the only movie theater that has ever operated in Coldwater.

The theater's seats were purchased from the American Seating Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A November 16, 1928 article in the *Western Star* described the building's features as including hardwood covering the auditorium's sloping concrete floor; upholstered chairs with arm rests provided seating for two hundred patrons on the main floor and one hundred additional chairs were



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at the balcony level. The interior featured "harmonizing colors with appropriate lighting fixtures for both bright and dim lights." In the new age of talking pictures, the theater had a Kolster-Tone machine to provide synchronized music.

In 1940, Gossett sold the theater to Bernard Stark and Victor and Donita Stark and they held a contest to select a new name for the theater. The winner, Mrs. C. G. Lyon, won twenty free movies for her suggestion of "Comanche" and the theater became known as Stark's Comanche Theatre.<sup>6</sup> The Starks owned the theater for six years before selling it to Sol and Lucille Frank. In 1947, the Franks remodeled the theater and renamed it the Chief Theatre.<sup>7</sup>

The theater acquired its notable Native American motif during the 1947 remodeling. The art work, which interprets the history of Coldwater and Comanche County, has precedent in the public art created during the New Deal era. At this time, the owner's enclosed the original recessed entrance area to form a foyer. A historic photograph from the fall of 1940 shows the theater with a different marquee that had scalloped edges and a rectangular sign mounted to the front of the canopy. What is now the entrance foyer appears to be open to the outside and recessed into the building.

In 1952, Porter and Betty Smith purchased the building from the Franks and began operating the theater only on the weekends.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1980s, the Smiths leased the theater to Joe and Connie Sunderland; however, shortly thereafter they closed the theater for eighteen months. In the summer of 1985, the Coldwater Chamber of Commerce bought the theater and began showing movies again. In 2002, eleven local residents formed the Chief Community Theater, Inc. and purchased the theater. The not-for-profit organization was established to restore the theater and to continue showing films at the theater.<sup>9</sup> The Chief Community Theater group wants to preserve the building's historic integrity and plans to restore the theater.

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<sup>6</sup> Coldwater (Kansas) Chamber of Commerce, "75 Years of Chief History," fundraising brochure (Coldwater: Chamber of Commerce, n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Coldwater Chamber of Commerce. "75 Years of Chief History." Brochure. Coldwater, KS: Coldwater Chamber of Commerce, n.d.

"New Theatre Opens Monday," *The Western Star*, 16 November 1928.

Russell, Bambi. Kansas State Historical Society Preliminary Site Information Questionnaire, 1997. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Sanborn Map Company. *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Coldwater, Comanche County Kansas*. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1923. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library [database online]; available from <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/>; Internet; accessed 14 May 2004.

Sanborn Map Company. *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Coldwater, Comanche County Kansas*. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1935. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library [database online]; available from <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/>; Internet; accessed 14 May 2004.

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Chief Theater  
Comanche County, Kansas

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lot 7, Block 32, Coldwater Original Town, Comanche County, Kansas.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

This nomination includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource.

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Section Photographic Documentation Page 10

Chief Theater  
Comanche County, Kansas

**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

Photographer: Kristen Ottesen  
Date of Photographs: June 2004  
Location of Negatives: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

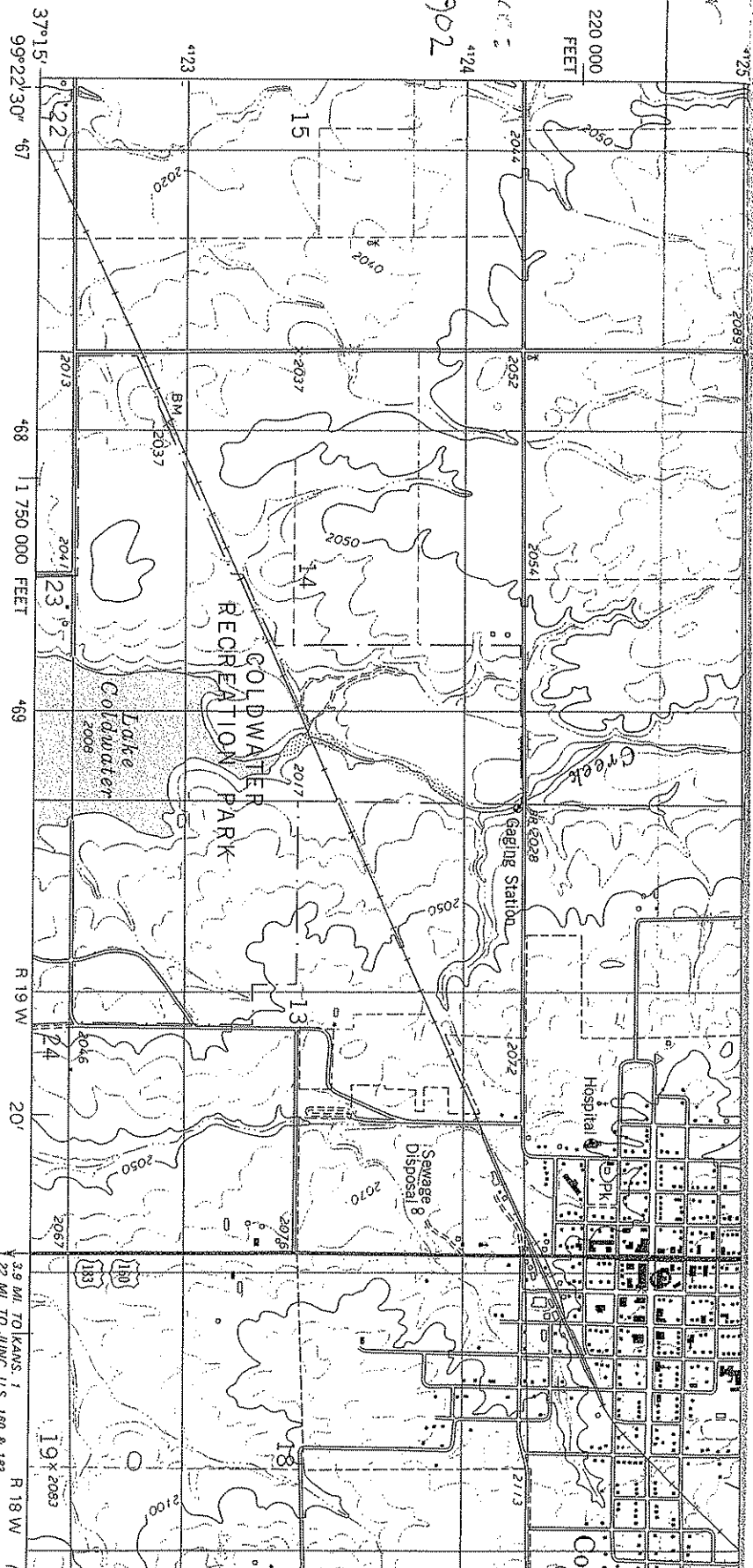
**Photograph  
Number**

**Camera View**

1. Front (south) elevation
2. Streetscape, view to the northeast
3. Rear elevations, view looking to the southeast
4. Rear elevations, view looking to the southwest
5. Marquee
6. Entrance
7. Lobby murals (view to the northeast)
8. Mural on the east lobby wall
9. Mural on the west lobby wall
10. Mural on the south lobby wall
11. Doors from the lobby to the foyer
12. Concession area in the foyer
13. Mural above the concession stand
14. West stairs to the balcony from the foyer
15. Front of the auditorium
16. Rear of the auditorium
17. Mural on the auditorium side wall
18. Mural on the auditorium side wall

Chief Theater  
Coldwater,  
Comanche Co., 220 000  
Kansas  
UTM Reference:  
14 470966/4124902

(PROTECTION)  
5158 III NW



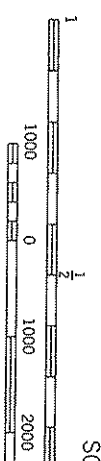
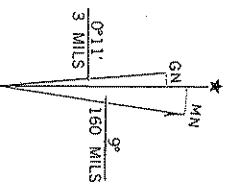
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1974. Field checked 1975. Map edited 1979

Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Kansas coordinate system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 14  
1927 North American datum

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
move the projection lines 33 meters east  
as shown by dashed corner ticks

UTM GRID AND 1979 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



CONTOUR  
NATIONAL GEODE

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, D  
AND STATE GEOLOGICAL  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC